

To Whom It May Concern;

I am writing as a representative of the Self-Advocacy Association of New York State, Inc. We are a not-for-profit organization that is run by and for people with developmental disabilities. Our membership across New York state numbers in the thousands and several of our regional offices produce shows for local cable access stations.

As I am sure you can imagine, people with developmental disabilities such as 'Cerebral Palsy' and 'autism' are as good as invisible on commercial television. They are not misrepresented or under represented, it is simply as if they do not exist unless being paraded as objects of pity on telethons. With the training and support of the Manhattan Neighborhood Network people with disabilities in New York City have been given the tools to tell their stories, in their own voices and with complete control over the content. We have produced documentaries and public service announcements that have been conceived, written, filmed and edited by people that are seen by most of the population as 'slow' 'incapable' and 'retarded'. MNN gave us a chance.

Our attempts to communicate with the major channels have been ignored without exception, but MNN truly serve the community and recognize the importance of being reflective of their audience as a whole. They made sure their training program was tailored to our needs, they bought equipment that could be used by people with gross and fine motor difficulties and have supported us and encouraged us through every step of the process. The access that the Manhattan Neighborhood Network have allowed us, has had a tremendous effect on both those people taking part in the program and New Yorkers in general, who get to glimpse a world that they have little access to. Surely television can serve no higher purpose.

Any community is the less when it prevents a percentage of it's citizens from joining the table. Commercial television is a sparse table indeed. It is only PEG TV channels that fully embrace the diversity of whole communities. We believe that it is essential that the FCC supports the franchise rules that protect public access television. Without these rules, programs such as ours will disappear and with them the only opportunity to see perspectives that fall outside the mainstream and yet reflect the true nature of our communities.

Yours Sincerely,

Catherine James and the self-advocates (Tim Elliot, Dora Becker, Michelle Santiago, Zefa Dedic, Nelcy Ramirez, Eric Pernick, Janice Bartley, Kanema Varner, Harvey Pacht, Tony Phillips, Harriet Leich, Leon McCutcheon, Ernesto Franco)

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